

Training for Small Wars

Subject Area Training

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"Small-scale military eruptions around the globe have demonstrated new forms of warfare with a different cast of characters - guerilla armies, terrorists, and bandits - pursuing diverse goals by violent means with the most primitive to the most sophisticated weapons."<sup>1</sup> The Marine Corps historically combats these irregular forces in a smaller war. The Small Wars Manual (1940) defines these conflicts as the following:

...operations undertaken under executive authority, wherein military force is combined with diplomatic pressure in the internal or external affairs of another state whose government is unstable, inadequate, or unsatisfactory for the preservation of life and of such interests as are determined by the foreign policy of our Nation.<sup>2</sup>

The Marine Corps will engage in small wars as long as the nation maintains military superiority relative to potential enemies. Despite this trend, the Marine Corps continued to focus the majority of its resources on training for a conventional fight well after the Soviet Union collapsed and non-state actors became the United States' primary

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), Front Cover.

<sup>2</sup> FMFRP 12-15, 1-1 pg 1<sup>2</sup> United States Marine Corps, *Small Wars Manual*, 1940 (Washington, D.C.: USGPO, 1940), 1.

threat.<sup>3</sup> Now the Marine Corps is fighting a small war in Iraq. Infantry Battalions must remain concentrated on and improve training for small wars by focusing on cultural awareness, specialized skills development, and Marine Corps supported field exercises.

### **Cultural Awareness**

Before 2003, the study of culture by any Marine other than the battalion intelligence officer was not stressed and certainly not formalized. Prior to the onset of stabilization and support operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, Marines derived kinetic solutions to a conventional enemy on map boards in tactical decision games or by demolished vehicle hulks in live fire exercises. Marines were generally not forced to analyze the cultural terrain or to consider the second and third order effects of their solutions.

Vietnam, Lebanon, Somalia, and Bosnia demonstrated a need for cultural awareness but did not generate a training focus. Following the collapse of Saddam's regime, Marines encountered a small war for which little preparation had

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<sup>3</sup> Crevelld, *Transformation of War*, 192.<sup>3</sup> William S. Lind, "Strategic Defense Initiative," *The American Conservative*, November 2004, 9-12.

been made. History shows the United States does not deploy to a country and intentionally leave it in shambles; therefore, an occupation is necessary in order to restore stability and help establish a functioning government. In order to prepare for the inevitable temporary occupations of foreign soil, the Marine Corps must build a backbone of knowledge concerning geographic and cultural regions at every rank.

The Army Special Forces give the Marine Corps a template for cultural integration. Each Special Forces Group has a geographic specialty to focus its language training and cultural study. The groups are deployable to any area of operation, but each group maintains enhanced cultural knowledge from other parts of the globe for future contingencies. The Marine Corps' operational tempo, budget, and personnel turnover make the Special Forces example difficult to implement, but much can be learned from their cultural focus.

The Marine Corps is currently planning to assign every career Marine a geographic and coinciding cultural specialty upon graduation from the Sergeant's Course or the Basic Officer's Course.<sup>4</sup> The years of study before the rank

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<sup>4</sup> LtGen James N. Mattis and LtCol Frank G. Hoffman, "Future Warfare: The Rise of Hybrid Wars," *Proceedings*, November 2005, 19.

of sergeant do not have to be lost. In fact, Training Command should give every Marine a cultural focus following recruit training. As an example, a Marine would focus on a subculture of Latin America, Africa, Southwest Asia, or Southeast Asia. Each platoon within the infantry battalion would focus on one of the larger geographic and cultural regions just mentioned. The operations officer, company commanders, and staff non-commissioned officers (SNCOs) armed with six to eight years of experience in studying their regions, would become the trainers and points of contact for Marines with the same regional specialty. Marines would progress in cultural study throughout their careers because increased proficiency would be required with each additional year in service. Tasks, conditions, and standards would be created for each rank and billet to coincide with proficiency requirements. Finally, cultural proficiency would be considered in promotion and assignment reinforcing the Marine Corps' commitment to cultural study.

Since Marines have different propensities for acquiring language, a diagnostic must be given to focus his efforts. An above average score on a language assessment would steer a Marine to focus on language expertise. Marines scoring below average would be assigned a specific region within their geographic and cultural areas. For

example, within southwest Asia, some Marines would focus on Iraq, others on Saudi Arabia. Minimal language skills would be required of all Marines, but those focusing on cultural awareness leading to cultural knowledge<sup>5</sup> would gain expertise in local social customs, religious factions/beliefs, military structures, political organizations, and economic situations to name a few. A requirement for sustainment hours and appropriate support structure for study groups would be reinforced to ensure adequate focus is placed on cultural training within each infantry battalion.

The understanding of how to study culture would be a combat multiplier to all units. The embedded cultural awareness and language skills in each battalion would make the Marine Corps more prepared to adapt to the expeditionary environment. Manpower would have to track and assign billets in order to spread cultural capabilities throughout the infantry battalions, producing resident knowledge in many areas of operation. A more culturally savvy Marine Corps would be worth the extra effort by the Marines in charge of personnel. The cultural awareness found in each battalion, along with the development of the

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<sup>5</sup> Cultural awareness would occur in the first four years of a Marine's career as he learns how to study culture and the basics of his assigned region. Cultural knowledge would be developed over his career as he improves his language skills and refines regional traits.

following specialized skills, will set the Marine Corps up for success in a small war.

### **Specialized Skills**

Marines traditionally attended schools to ready themselves for increased responsibility or to more fully understand conventional operations in a different environment. The Corporal's Course, Sergeant's Course, military operations in urban terrain (MOUT) instructor's course, Squad Leader's Course, and Mountain Leader's Course are informative, but they do not prepare Marines adequately to excel in a small war. The skills needed to produce success in a small war do not require long programs of instruction (POI). Efficient, relatively short courses, with solid references provided to the student, would be more effective. The trained individuals would then sustain their skills and cross-train other Marines in their unit on various specialties. An increased focus on decision-making in formal schools, combined with the following additional POIs, would enhance the infantry battalion's ability to succeed in a small war.



"Brilliance in the basics"<sup>6</sup> is a Marine Corps tradition; however, although the nature of war has not changed, some of the basics have shifted. Marines can adapt to this shift by expanding knowledge on skills they already train to execute. The new rifle qualification course is a good example due to the focus on combat shooting. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Division schools have initiated Rifle Combat Optic (RCO) courses to refine marksmanship skills as well. Additionally, a one to two week designated marksman course with sniping, observation, and target identification as the focus should be developed to mitigate collateral damage and enhance situational awareness in an urban small war.

Explosives and communications are skills infantrymen adequately cross-trained on for years; however, the current improvised explosive device (IED) threats, trends toward urban operations, and the ever-increasing complexity of communications equipment, require more focus on these areas. A condensed assault breacher's course with IED identification and considerations should be added to division schools or offered quarterly on each coast for assaultmen within infantry battalions. The battalion

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<sup>6</sup> "Brilliance in the basics" is an often quoted slogan that refers to the fundamentals of warfighting. The slogan is normally associated with small unit fire and maneuver, defense, and patrolling against a conventional enemy. The basics of a small war shift to fundamentals needed to fight an enemy much more difficult to define.

would be able to maintain adequate trainers within the communications platoon as long as each new piece of communications equipment came with a mobile training team. The team would provide instruction for the time necessary to teach communication Marines how to maximize the new technology.

The art of de-escalation is a skill the Marine Corps rarely focused on before security operations in Iraq commenced in May of 2003. A formal law enforcement and negotiation course, coupled with a robust ride along program would arm Marines with the knowledge a policing force requires. A cop has failed if a shootout occurs. A negotiator has failed if the jumper leaps. Marines have failed if collateral damage is a trend.

Additionally, finding and cultivating informants, as well as tracking criminal links are skills needed to foster success in a small war. With the shortage of human intelligence Marines, a course on tactical questioning would increase the battalion's situational awareness and potentially decrease their time to action. The argument that policing actions and criminal investigation are not infantry battalion missions does not match the current tasks in Iraq. The infantry battalion can best train and test these small war skills at a Marine Corps supported

facility with professional role players and an efficient support structure.

### **Corps Supported Training Exercises**

More than a decade after the Berlin wall fell and Saddam's forces were pushed out of Kuwait, the Combined Arms Exercise (CAX) failed to train and test the decision-making abilities of the infantry squad leader except on range 410A. Fire support coordinators and fire support teams (FST) prosecuted static demolished hulks of metal in an attempt to validate the infantry battalion's proficiency in combined arms. Both of these activities became a rehearsed battle drill rather than a mental challenge. With few exceptions, units trained to go to the CAX instead of training at the CAX. Conventional combined arms skills cannot be lost at the FST level and above, but the Marine Corps cannot return to a CAX format offering relatively few decision-making opportunities to the rifle platoon commanders and below following Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The Revised Combined Arms Exercise (RCAX) is a strong step in the right direction toward more decision-making based unit training. In addition, co-location of the Urban Warfare Training Center (UWTC) with the Tactical Training

Exercise Control Group in 29 Palms, California eases the logistic burden of participating battalions. However, the support structure to facilitate small wars training remains inadequate.

The plan for a substantially larger MOUT facility at the Marine Air Ground Task Force Training Command is encouraging. However, the facility needs household furnishings, running water, utilities, a functioning school, local service vendors, and hundreds of contracted role players that live and work there whenever a training unit is on deck in order to provide realistic training. The current plan does not account for these necessities. The role players, under the command of screened and selected instructor/controller staff, must form a functioning society with well-rehearsed personalities and unit integrity. Civilian vehicles, veterinarians for the role players' pets, and medical personnel should all be permanently on station as part of the support structure for the RCAX.

The UWTC concept should be expanded to include a cadre on the east coast with associated facilities on Camp Lejeune. The UWTC on the west coast at MCAGCC could have role players that speak Mandarin, Korean, and Arabic, and the east coast unit could have Spanish and Arabic speakers.

If the Department of Defense (DOD) paid four hundred role players \$40,000 a year, the Marine Corps could hire them for two years at around the cost of one Joint Strike Fighter or three Expeditionary Fighting Vehicles. Unfortunately those four hundred jobs do not get a congressman re-elected like the factories used to produce parts for large machines.

The small wars facilities would challenge the decision-making abilities of and force initiative, adaptability, and creativity upon every level of leadership from fire-team leader to battalion commander. The DOD must find the money to build these training centers because the skills honed at these facilities would generate tempo on the small wars battlefield from day one.

### **Conclusion**

The Marine Corps must improve its' ability to fight and win the small war regardless of the outcome of current conflicts. Cultural awareness and knowledge has been identified as a resource shortfall in the Marine Corps and continued effort must be placed on how to develop culturally intelligent Marines. The basics of fighting a counterinsurgency and a mechanized attack are different.

The differences must be recognized and trained to. Currently, the Marine Corps' entry and career level schools and training exercises focus too much on the means without encouraging flexibility in analyzing measures of effectiveness, a skill necessary when fighting a small war.

The conflict in Vietnam motivated numerous books on fighting guerilla forces and many scholars have noted the decline of the state as the sole war-making entity.<sup>7</sup> All indications foreshadow an extended stay if the United States decides to involve itself in the politics of another country by force. Stability and success are not secured with precision-guided munitions and advanced armor, but with enhanced cultural acumen and effective decision-makers. The infantry battalion is the center of gravity in past, present, and future small wars. The Marine Corps cannot afford to set the battalions up for anything but success. (word count = 2,089)

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<sup>7</sup> Van Crevald, *The Transformation of War*, 192.

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